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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 SUVA 000455

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SUBJECT: First Pacific Island Climate Change Roundtable Meeting

11. Summary: The South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) convened the first Pacific Roundtable on Climate Change (CCRT) in Apia, Samoa from 14 - 17 October with funding from the Government of Switzerland. 133 participants from governments, regional organizations, academia, civil society and the media took part. The Swiss touted their proposal to fund adaptation efforts through a global carbon levy. Roundtable discussions centered on food security, adaptation strategies, information gaps and knowledge sharing. (Participants developed an inventory of regional activities and set plans in place for developing a Pacific Climate Change Portal.) Kiribati got no support for considering population relocation as an option. A UN proposal to set up a Pacific UN Climate Change Center was met with some skepticism by donors and regional organizations. End Summary.

12. The CCRT met from 14 to 17 October at the National University of Samoa to share information on current and planned actions on climate change in the region; to finalize a matrix providing a clear overview of ongoing and planned activities including a proposed climate change portal; and to agree on next steps for the Action Plan and CCRT process. Representatives from all Pacific island countries (PICs) were present except Fiji and PNG. The US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, the EU, Japan, and Switzerland were also represented, as were ADB, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UN Population Fund, FAO, the Red Cross, Swedish Commission on Climate Change and Development, IUCN, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the South Pacific Applied Geosciences Commission (SOPAC) and various local and international NGOs working in the region. USG participants were Eileen Shea, Director of NOAA's Integrated Data and Environmental Applications Center (IDEA) and Embassy Suva's Regional Environment Affairs Specialist (RES). Le Laulu, President of Counterpart International based in Washington, DC facilitated the CCRT, which was opened by Wellington-based Swiss Ambassador Dr. Beat Nobs. Background papers are available from: http://www.sprep.org/climate_change/pccr.htm.

Swiss funding scheme for the Bali Action Plan

13. Ambassador Nobs presented a Swiss proposal to finance climate change adaptation through a global carbon levy to be established uniformly across the countries based on the principles of "common but differentiated responsibilities" and of "polluter pays." The

proposal would establish a new mechanism for national and international climate change adaptation to be financed based on emissions and economic strength.

Factors encumbering effective adaptation across the region

14. Over the course of the week, discussions highlighted common issues impeding effective adaptation efforts in PICs: lack of financial resources and human capacity; lack of integration, coordination and cooperation between the different government agencies; lack of awareness at community level; lack of data and poor maintenance of climatic/weather data collecting equipment; lack of political will/support, lack of leadership, and failure to mainstream climate change into national/sector planning. Participants also acknowledged the need to move towards evidence-based methods of decision making. On the issue of national capacity, PICs stated that in most countries, there is only one Climate Change Officer in Government. This is a clear sign that while countries have identified climate change as a priority, they have not allocated enough financial and human resources to address the problem. Some countries highlighted that staff who have been trained left to join other organizations mostly because of better pay. Some participants highlighted the need to upscale pilot projects and share lessons learned. Participants also discussed poor linkages between biodiversity, health, agriculture and climate change projects and considered establishing a joint expert group on biodiversity and climate change to better coordinate activities of the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable and the Pacific Roundtable on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas.

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Adaptation Funding/future commitments

15. According to SPREP, the Pacific islands region received a total of USD 42.1 million between the period 1999 to 2008 for climate adaptation/risk and disaster management and climate support (including capacity building, research and monitoring) projects. AUSAID made a presentation on Australia's new climate initiative, which entails a commitment of 150 million Australian dollars for climate change adaptation. According to the AUSAID presentation, the primary geographic emphasis of the program will be Australia's neighboring island countries, but targeted policy and technical assistance will also be available for other countries in the region. The objectives of the program are to: establish a sound policy, scientific and analytical basis for long-term Australian action to help developing partner countries adapt to the impacts of climate change; increase understanding in partner countries of the impacts of climate change on their natural and socioeconomic systems; enhance partner country capacity to assess key climate vulnerabilities and risks, formulate appropriate adaptation strategies and plans, mainstream adaptation into decision making, and identify and help finance priority adaptation measures to increase the resilience of partner countries to the impacts of climate change. Japanese representatives discussed Tokyo's Cool Earth Partnership initiative for adaptation and improved access to clean energy projects. Under this initiative, Japan will fund measures to assist developing countries that are vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

16. Some PIC representatives asked that donors provide countries with their criteria for funding and with clear reporting requirements. They complained that a lot of their time is "wasted" on reporting to the donor agencies. PIC representatives also requested that donor activities be better coordinated. The CCRT heard complaints that some countries were not able to access funds because they didn't have the expertise to write proposals. Cook Islands representative added that donors could play a part in ensuring that the projects they fund are in line with national priorities. The Swiss Ambassador responded by saying that countries need to take a lead and tell donors what their priorities are and not rely on donors to provide guidance. Often donors are told that projects are donor driven and this is mostly because countries are not able to provide a leadership role, he said.

17. Pacific island country representatives showed little interest in

discussing mitigation in this forum. Few participants attended the mitigation session or engaged in plenary discussions on the topic. Nevertheless, the countries did recognize that national policies should be developed to ensure that countries adapt their energy sectors to renewable energy. (Comment: The renewable energy agenda in the region is driven more by the high fuel prices than climate concerns. End comment.)

Food Security - an emerging issue and new priority

¶18. Many countries highlighted that there is a need to seriously look at food security issues. A steering committee made up of SPREP, SPC, USP, and FAO met in closed sessions during the week to look at next steps on how to incorporate the Rome 2008 Summit Declaration into the Action Plan and the Pacific Climate Change project, as well as other initiatives. The steering committee, during their report back to the plenary, highlighted some of the key food security issues for the region, with emphasis on those that had serious climate change implications or where climate change would exacerbate the current stresses. They concluded that there is an urgent need to build the resilience of food production systems to climate change, particularly by diversifying the options for growing crops and harvesting fish. The committee recognized the efforts that are already underway in the region including the US Department of State's "Conserving and Promoting Crop Diversity to Enhance Food Security in a Changing Climate" project with SPC. Other issues of relevance to the region that the committee identified included the need to step up investment in science and technology for food and

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agriculture, undertake vulnerability analyses for all food production sectors, and mainstream climate change adaptation into national policies, strategies and programmes related to agriculture, forestry and fisheries. They also highlighted the need to maintain biodiversity and apply an ecosystem based approach. The steering committee also presented some ideas as to how the region could put the Rome outcomes into a proper regional perspective.

¶19. In terms of next steps, their presentation advocated undertaking vulnerability analyses for all food production sectors, raising awareness of threats to food security and available solutions at the community level, providing incentives for economic growth to increase the options for achieving food security, and ensuring the appropriateness of agricultural courses taught in tertiary institutes. FAO would convene a further meeting of the steering committee to finalize the plan to 'regionalize' the High Level Declaration and implement the adaptations needed in the Pacific to provide food security in the face of climate change. The committee noted that work in this area should be aligned closely with the Mauritius Strategy for the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States and the UNFCCC Bali Action Plan.

Relocation - the last option for a sinking atoll nation?

¶10. Kiribati raised the issue of relocation. David Lambourne, Kiribati's Solicitor General, told participants that, while many PICs are considering relocating within their own countries, Kiribati is considering extra-territorial relocation as an option. Lambourne emphasized that many people in Kiribati are not keen on moving. Nevertheless, if extra-territorial relocation does occur, Lambourne said that the people of Kiribati would, "not like to be taken to some refugee camp in Australia," so must plan now for better options. No other delegation addressed this issue, which has been the subject of heated internal debate among PICs in their preparations for global climate negotiations.

Pacific Islands Climate Change Portal

¶11. NOAA's Eileen Shea presented on information needs, communications issues and the potential for a regional climate change web based portal. CCRT participants agreed that there is a need for the Pacific climate change portal, and that a small technical group made up of experts and interested persons identify what already exists in the international and regional communities and explore the lessons learned from existing initiatives such as the Pacific Disaster net and Pacific Islands Global Climate

Observing Systems (PI-GCOS). The CCRT noted that SPREP has a mandate as a clearinghouse for climate change information, and urged that SPREP pursue a climate change knowledge advisor position as a high priority and endorsed an ongoing role for it in support of the Pacific Climate Change Portal. NOAA, Australian and New Zealand representatives agreed to explore options for a scooping phase for the portal. (In addition, Australia expressed a strong interest in collaborating with the US in climate services and portal development in the context of the Pacific Climate Information System (PaCIS) and the broader Roundtable endeavor.)

Climate Change Inventory/Matrix

¶12. SPREP and the UNDP Suva Office have developed a Climate Change Matrix for the region. The SPREP matrix consists of information on projects that are implemented by national governments and by CROP agencies while the UNDP matrix contains information on projects the donors are funding. Both the SPREP and UNDP matrices will be shared with stakeholders with an aim to better coordinate climate change initiatives in the region.

2009 Pacific Year for Climate Change - "Our century's challenge - Our Pacific response"

¶13. In Pohnpei in September, the 19th SPREP Meeting declared 2009 the "Pacific Year for Climate Change." SPREP presented

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possible/planned activities for next year. CCRT members commented on the activities and suggested that campaigns should be designed to meet national as well as regional objectives. SPREP is in the process of developing a regional communication plan. SPREP suggested that countries develop national communications plans as well.

UN Pacific Center for Climate Change?

¶14. FAO's Dr. Vili Fuavao, the Acting Resident Coordinator of the UN agencies, presented a new UN initiative to establish an inter-agency Climate Change Centre for the Pacific. Fuavao explained the rationale behind the proposal and stated that there will be a thorough consultation with all relevant stakeholders such as government climate change focal points, experts and civil society. Although a number of participants expressed concerns that the proposal is another top-down UN effort. The Samoan Government is very supportive of the idea and has already allocated a piece of land on which the proposed center will be built. When asked if any background document was available on the Center, Fuavao said that that center is just an idea and there will be a consultation process. We subsequently obtained a draft concept paper that is being circulated within the UN circles (copies passed to OES/EGC and IO/EDA). The main objective stated for this proposal is to further develop and strengthen the capacity of Pacific countries and understand and respond to the effects of climate change. The centre would supposedly provide means to effectively channel the resources of the UN, other partner agencies, regional institutions and development partners on climate change. It would also approach climate change from a "sustainable human development perspective" rather than just an environmental issue.

¶15. CCRT members asked whether the establishment of a Climate Change Centre would increase the effectiveness of climate change programmes of the UN and other agencies in the Pacific. Delegates asked if another climate change center is really needed and if the establishment of this center will result in duplication of work. NZ representative Tom Wilson sounded a word of caution and remarked that such initiatives place additional demands on the donor community. CCRT members questioned how the center would fund itself and if there will be any implications on the work of regional organizations such as SPREP.

Next steps

¶16. A second CCRT is planned for next year to consider the ramifications of COP-14 at Poznan. The meeting will review activities planned for the Pacific Year for Climate Change and should be held in time to produce actions in further support of the

year. The CCRT noted the interest of the Marshall Islands in hosting this event. The next meeting would also consider operationalizing the matrices and the portal. The facilitator suggested that participants should also consider the need to make future meetings of the CCRT as carbon neutral as possible and look for community programmes in the host country to donate their carbon offsets to, building on existing initiatives. Furthermore participants were urged to start discussing the transformation of their organizations into carbon neutral entities. There is a need for the CCRT secretariat, based at SPREP, to investigate the potential for a regional study on the economic aspects of climate change for the Pacific region, the affects of climate change on tourism, and to develop appropriate actions for adaptation and mitigation in that sector. The facilitator stated that the countries need to seek private sector support for these efforts.

¶17. Comment: As it stands, the Pacific region has limited capacity to adapt to climate change. Countries lack both technical expertise and financial resources. There is a serious need for climatic/weather data and equipment. Donors have been asked to pay special attention to the capacity needs of the region and where possible help build regional capacity. SPC, SPREP and SOPAC are the three regional organizations which are assisting countries at different levels and they have been asked to better coordinate their

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climate-related programs. Members of the CCRT recognized that, since climate change is a cross-cutting issue, there is a need to better integrate it into the different sectors. The proposed UN Center for Climate Change would probably have serious implications on the operations of regional institutions and donors, however, and would be an expensive and inefficient mechanism to attempt to achieve this integration. End Comment.

¶18. NOAA IDEA Center Director Eileen Shea cleared this report.
McGann